

Poll Worker Shortages: Could students be the solution?

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Recent election reforms have addressed many of the challenges facing our election process, but one that remains can only be fixed by civic participation. On Election Day, it takes over 30,000 poll workers to run Indiana's 5,500 precincts. These folks are often in short supply. Understaffed polling places could stunt elections in the United States and Indiana, but **you** could be the solution. College students—intelligent, energetic and computer savvy—should participate in this important service and even earn a stipend for their work.

In 2004, for example, two million election inspectors, judges and clerks were needed to staff the polling places, check names of voters on the poll list and turn in each precinct's vote to county authorities. Of the two million people needed, only half of the poll-worker slots were filled. These volunteers are vital to maintaining a successful election process, ensuring the integrity of our democracy. Delays in many areas of the country were due to missing poll workers, who had to do the job of two or even three people, rather than the malfunctioning of machines or any malfeasance.

Moreover, the average age of poll workers in Indiana is 72. If we take Marion County out of the mix, the average age skyrockets to 80! While the poll workers who do this job do it well, by 2020 many of our current dedicated crew will no longer be with us, literally losing centuries of experience. The shortage of people willing to serve our electoral system (for pay) and the increasing age of volunteers mean that the United States will soon be desperate for enough poll workers to sustain our democracy.

In an effort to better staff our polling locations and involve students in the political system, the American Democracy Project at IU has teamed up with Indiana Campus Compact and Indiana Secretary of State Todd Rokita's office to change this situation. This collaboration is forging ahead with an initiative that will recruit and engage college students across the state and to be poll workers on Election Day.

Working the polls is a great way to perform an important civic duty that we all can agree is necessary. It also is a wonderful introduction to the way elections are won and lost, and to aspiring political activists. Hoosier Scholars Helping Democracy is the only statewide program of its kind in the nation. Indiana Campus Compact and the American Democracy Project will use its network of faculty, students and staff to recruit students and advocates in an ambitious plan of civic service across the state. We are bringing a message of civic engagement to campuses, and to help solve one threat to our tradition of well ordered and fair elections in Indiana.

(Editor's note: For more information, contact Koponen at E-mail: tkoponen@iupui.edu .)

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